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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of a five-day program designed to introduce first-grade children to decision-making processes. Included in the paper are: (1) lists of assumptions, goals, and strategies; (2) a day-by-day outline of activities; and (3) a reader's theater script based on "The Legend of the Bluebonnet" for use by the students. A 12-item selected reading list is attached. (RS)

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Presentation at the Spring Conference of National Council of Teachers of English, Indianapolis Convention Center. March 14. 1991

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Assumptions:

1. The future of true democracy rests on a citizenry which is willing to consider alternate choices and make responsible decisions.

2. We have done little to develop and promote real decision making in our schools. Children become passive and dependent learners.

3. Teachers must also become decision makers in their own classrooms, developing curriculum along with their children.

4. In-depth discussions of decision making scenarios from children literature can spark reflective decision making in the classroom.

Goals:

1. To provide children with opportunities to discuss decision making and become aware of the **processes of decision making** as exemplified in children literature.

2. To provide children with opportunities to become **actively involved in making decisions** in the classroom.

3. To help children become aware of the bases upon which they make decisions and to consider **alternative decisions**.

4. To help children accept the **responsibility of the consequences** of their decisions.

Strategies

1. **Decision making charts** related to children's literature. (List decisions, consequences, alternatives).

2. **Decision webs.** Put the "problem" from the story in the center of the

web. A variety of ways of webbing may follow: who made decisions, what were those decisions, what factors influenced those decisions, what could alternate decisons have been, what were the consequences, what would alternate consequences have been.

3. **Curricular decision making**. Children can join in the planning of daily activities. One example: the children sign up to teach for a particular period of time on a particular day. They decide what they will teach, how to arrange their teaching setting, how many other children will be involved.

Getting Started

Day One-Two.

1. Read The Legend of the Bluebonnet by Tomie DePaola.

2. Using the attached Reader's Theatre script of Tomie DePaola's, The Legend of the Bludebonnet, have students read the text themselves, assigning parts to various children or groups of children.

3. Following the reader's theatre presentation, have the student do a semantic web of all the decisions that were made, who made them, reasons behind them, and consequences of them.

4. Group should then compare webs and discuss similarities and differences.

Day Three-Four.

1. Students should begin chart their decision-making at home.

2. Surveys of older students and younger within the school can help children see how decision-making at home changes with age.

Day Five.

1. Students and the teacher should chart their decision making at school.

2. Discuss which decision could be made by the children and which classroom responsibities could be given the children.

Gradually move into more curriculuar areas for decision-making. Read children literature that emphasizes decision-making. Keep charts, lists, webs of the decisions made by characters in the books and by children in the classroom. (See bibiography).

Reader's Theatre:
The Legend of the Bluebonnet
retold by Tomie DePaola

Dancers: Great Spirits, the land is dying. Your people are dying too. Tell us what we have done to anger you. End this drought. Save your people. Tell us what we must do so you will send the rain that will bring back life.

Narrator: For three days, the dancer danced to the sound of the drums. And for three days, the People called Comanche watched and waited. And even through the hard winter was over, no healing rains came.

Drought and famine are hardest on the very young and the very old. Among the few children left was a small girl named She who is alone. She sat by herself watching the dancers. In her lap was a doll made from buckskin--a warrior doll. The eyes, nose and mouth were painted on with the juice of berries. It wore beaded leggings and a belt of polished bone. On its head were brilliant blue feathers from the bird who cries, "jay-jay -jay." She loved her doll very much.

She-Who-is-Alone: Soon the shaman will go off alone to the top of the hill to listen for the words of the Great Spirits Then, we will know what to do so that once more the rains will come and the Earth will be green and alive. The buffalo will be plentiful and the People will be be rich again.

Narrator: As she talked, she thought of the mother who made the doll, of the father who brought the blue feathers. She thought of the grandfather and the grandmother she had never known. They were all like shadows. It seemed so long ago that they had died from the famine. The People had named her and cared for her. The warrior doll was the only thing she had left from those distant days.

Runner: The sun is setting. The shaman is returning!

Narrator: The People gathered in a circle and the shaman spoke.

Shaman: I have heard the words of the Great Spirits. The People have become selfish. For years, they have taken from the Earth without giving anything back. The Great Spritis say the People much sacrifice. We must make a burnt offering of the most valued possession among us. The ashes of this offering shall then be scattered to the four points of the Earth, the Home of the Winds. When this sacrifice is made, drought and famine will cease. Life will be restored to the Earth and to the People.

Narrator: The people sang a song of thanks to the Great Spirits for telling them what they must do.

Warrior: I'm sure it is not my new bow that the Great Spirits want.

Woman: Or my special blanket.

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Narrator: Everyone went to their tipis to talk and think over what the Great Spirits had asked. Everyone, that is, except She-Who-is -Alone. She held her doll tightly to her heart.

She-who-is-Alone: You.....you are my most valued possession. It is you the Great Spirits want.

Narrator: And she knew what she must do. As the council fires dies out and the tipi flaps began to close, the small girl returned to the tipi where she slept, to wait. The night outside was still except for the distant sound of the night bird with the red wings. Soon everyone in the tipi was asleep, except She-who -is-alone. Under the ashes of the tipi fire one stick still glowed. She took it and quietly crept out into the night. She ran to the place on the hill where the Great Spirits had spoken to the shaman. Stars filled the sky, but there was no moon.

She-who-is-alone: Oh, Great Spirits, here is my warrior doll. It is the only thing I have from my family who died in this famine. It is my most valued possession. Please accept it.

Narrator: Then, gathering twigs, she started a fire with the glowing firestick. The small girl watched as the twigs began to catch and burn. She thought of her grandmother and grandfather, her mother and father and all the People...their suffering, their hunger. And before she could change her mind, she thrust the doll into the fire. She watched until the flames died down and the ashes had grown cold. Then, scooping up a handful, She -who-is-alone scattered the ashes to the Home of the Winds, the North and the East, the South, and the West. And there she fell asleep until the first light of the morning sun awoke her. She looked out over the hill, and stretching out from all sides, where the ashes had fallen, the ground was covered with flowers--beautiful flowers, as blue as the feathers in the hair of the doll, as blue as the feathers of the bird who cries, "Jay -jay-jay."

When the People came out of their tipis, they could scarcely believe their eyes. They gathered on the hill with She-who-is -alone to look at the miraculous sight. There was no doubt about it, the flowers were a sign of forgiveness from the Great Spirits. And as the People sang, and danced their thanks to the Great Spirits, a warm rain began to fall and the land began to live again. From that day on, the little girl was known by another name, "One-who-dearly-loved-her-people."

And every spring, the Great Spirits remember the sacrifice of a little girl and fill the hills and valleys of the land, now called Texas, with the beautiful blue flowers.

Even to this very day.

Selected Reading List

Allsburg, Chris Van, Two Bad Ants

Browne, Anthony, The Piggybook

Carle, Eric, A House for Hermit Crab

Cohen, Caron Lee, The Mud Pony

Cooney, Barbara, Miss Rumphius

dePaola, Tomie, The Legend of the Blue Bonnet

Kimmel, Eric, Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock

Lowry, Lois, Number the Stars

Monjo, F. N., The Drinking Gourd

Rice, Eve, New Blue Shoes

Surat, Michele Maria, Angel Child, Dragon Child

Tsuchiya, Yukio, Faithful Elephants